If you can believe your eyes and ears.

Insert drawing

To My Friends and Family, for their undying support.

Foreword

I began writing this book after seeing an Instagram reel in mid-to-late 2024. At the time, I was competing in a mooting competition on one of India's top law platforms: *Lawctopus*. My case involved gathering evidence to support an environmental project, specifically to allow infrastructure development in the Indian state of Gujarat.

The reel I stumbled upon featured famous Indian politician Shashi Tharoor, but something was off. While the clip was clearly taken from a real podcast appearance, the audio had been altered. Instead of discussing Indian politics and the

opposition, he appeared to be talking about *femboys*.

Naturally, I found the meme hilarious, and the group chat it was sent to erupted with laughter. But once the amusement wore off, something struck me: how easily could someone use this kind of fabricated clip as “evidence” of Tharoor’s corruption or moral bankruptcy?

That question stuck with me — and it became a seed that manifested in this foreword, and indeed, the book that followed.

Foreword

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The boring part where I explain everything in excruciating detail

Chapter -1 Jiving Jones

Bored

Mr. Jones was bored.

It was a shining bright Monday in Suburbia, and Mr. Jones was bored.

7:29 AM, read the clock on his wall.

His alarm was set for 7:30, but Jones had been awake for hours, just wondering about his mundane existence. He liked to

believe this likened him to a philosopher, contemplating the realities of the world around him. Reality, however, painted him in a different complexion—less Aristotle and more a grumpy Joe glaring at the wall.

Moments later, a sharp SHRILLLLLLLL leapt from the hands of his clock.

“IT’S 7:30 AM GREENWICH STANDARD TIME ON THE 14TH OF OCTOBER 2062. YOU’VE GOT THIS, MR. JONES,” said the voice from the machine.

Jones’s oversized, misshapen hand firmly pressed the mechanism into place.

“YOU ARE AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF BEING MACHI—”

At once, the deafening noise from the machine was reduced to a mechanical hum, as though Jones were holding the vocal cords of the alarm.

As usual, Jones got up and began his everyday routine. He brushed his teeth, despite the moans from his Golcate Brushed 9000 about the state of his gums.

He put on his trousers and tolerated their grumblings about having to sustain themselves around the “ever-expanse” (their rather queer name for his waistline). Then he ate breakfast.

It was perfect. It always was perfect. Jones hadn’t done any of this on his own since that fateful Black Friday sale in 2048. Yet there was just something missing.

He got the morning paper and grumbled at the news. It screamed at him, which was the only thing that remained unchanged in the last two decades. His hands quickly shut the front page up. After all, what kind of sane man would want to listen to the intricacies of new judicial reform? He quickly turned to the funny pages like any respectable and, quite frankly, conscious being would.

In this moment, nothing differentiated Jones from any other grumpy, middle-aged, brown-haired Englishman—apart from his sporadic bursts of optimism. Although, come to think of it, those were rather standard as well.

He kissed the wife and family goodbye—along with his loved ones, his smart fridge, and new TV—before grabbing his

keys and stuffing them into the aluminium slit in his car door.

Suddenly, a roar sprung onto his ears from the adjacent yards.

“JOHNNY, I’VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR GARBAGE! I SPOKE TO MY PERSONAL ASSISTANT. SHE TELLS ME YOU ARE HURTING ME WITH YOUR DISPLAYS OF INDIFFERENCE!”

“OH, NOT CARING A CRIME NOW, IS IT MOLLY? WHAT’S NEXT? SENDING ME TO THE AUTOMATIC END MACHINE FOR BREATHING TOO HARD?”

“Lovely,” thought Mr. Jones to himself. “The fresh smell of dirty laundry.”

As he made himself comfortable in his car seat, an all-too-familiar blue screen flashed before his eyes.

“Ugggggggghh?” groaned Jones.

“Firmware update ready for install, Archminder.”

Jones, understandably upset by this reminder of his poor choice in naming himself on carbook.co.uk, replied aptly:

“Don’t update, I’m pleading with you, I haven’t th—”

“Understood, Archminder. Updating now.”

Jones slumped in his chair. He accepted the fact that the following three minutes of his life were to be thoroughly wasted in anticipation.

“Would you like to browse the news?” flashed a prompt on the secondary auxiliary screen.

Realising that listening to the monkeying of the world around him would be significantly more stimulating than just waiting, Jones consented.

BREAKING FROM THE BRITONS BANANAS CORPORATION: JUDGE ISAROBOT BREAKS THE RECORD FOR FASTEST CASE EVER, WITH A RECORD 1.1 SECONDS.

Recently, Judge ISAROBOT, hailing from Islington North-East, released a ruling in regard to the Pinker case in 1.1 seconds. Minister Bernaard of the Ministry of Judicial Objects (MOJO) had this to say:

"The speed at which the reasoning and obiter dicta were delivered is yet another impressive result of the 'Stop the Cases' initiative launched by the PM's office," said a stout, grey-haired man. "No doubt this shows the efficiency of the new Happy Party government, and our ability to—"

"Save it for the investors' conference, Captain Cranky," muttered Jones.

In other news: an opinion on why fast fashion is killing the planet.

The front screen blinked. “Update complete. You may proceed, Archminder.”

Jones let out a deep breath of relief. He could finally leave for work and take a nice, relaxing Monday drive.

“Engaging augmented viewing mode. Safety rating: 99%, with a hint of danger. Remember, you are legally responsible for any damages…”

The voice was drowned out—at least metaphorically—by the sights that the screens began to display.

Jones smiled. The car showed him only what he needed to see: clear skies, beautiful people, and a road made of candy. The drab and frankly disgusting

realities of, well, reality couldn't bother him here.

With his perception fully and finally clouded to his personal liking, Jones embarked on his journey to work.

His eyes glistened. Broken pieces of concrete were transformed into pieces of cake on the road. Faded signs that would have been a bother to read now sang their messages to him in perfect harmony.

With the Elysian landscape, only one thing remained—one thing that absolutely annoyed Jones beyond belief:

It made him hungry.

On the best of days, this was enough to break him into a grumble. But today was not the best of days. Between the update

and having to hear his oh-so-cheerful neighbours, Jones was set to be in a bad mood.

The sudden appearance of a hole in his stomach (despite having just eaten) was enough to push him over the edge. He was primed for an anti-climactic meltdown, the embarrassing kind that makes you feel like an out-of-control child who's just had his lolly taken away for saying the word "butt."

In a sudden jerking motion, Jones lightly tapped the manual-emergency steering wheel.

Satisfied with this act of defiance, he rotated his neck and, along with it, his eyes toward a literal big rock made of candy that looked like a mountain. He

stared at it longingly, and an instant later—

“AH, YOU BLITHERING IDIOT!”

Jones jerked upwards, pulling a muscle in his leg, evidently not sticking the landing back to reality. In front of him, the blue light flashed across his face again, with the usual snow-white text replaced by a more eye-catching crimson red. It read as follows:

ERROR 101: PEDESTRIAN HIT. SUBPAR LOOKS. SEEMS UNLIKELY TO PUT UP A FUSS.

Jones's heart sank into his stomach, filling the hole created by the software. There it would remain for the following 48 hours, until a surprisingly filling jam sandwich would displace it.

"I AM QUITE LIKELY TO PUT UP A FIGHT ACTUALLY. I COME FROM A LONG LINEAGE OF FIGHTERS. MY FIFTIETH REMOVED GREAT-GRANDMOTHER IS GENGHIS KHA—"

At this juncture, Jones stopped listening, believing he had more to worry about—legally speaking—than the ramblings of the man he had just hit with a car.

In that moment, he wondered whether the man would press charges. "After all," he thought, "if he was going to do so,

surely the threat monitor would have warned me by now."

The moment Jones finished the last syllable within that thought, a sudden roar unceremoniously climbed out of the computer screen and into his eardrums.

"PEDESTRIAN NOW CLASSIFIED AS UGLY BUT LIKELY TO PUT UP A FUSS. THREAT LEVEL: 40%. LIKELY INSECURE ABOUT THE SIZE OF HIS NOSE."

Shocked by the almost instant response from the computer, he leapt out of the car door onto the dirty, unkempt streets.

An interesting thing you, dear reader, should know about the streets of the city that Jones stepped onto: they are almost always made of concrete. While this is

difficult to imagine, falling on concrete tends to hurt. Large refined rock, placed in a smooth manner for pedestrians and cars to go on, tends to be quite hard, y'know?

So, when Jones found himself on the concrete—which had looked like cake through the software window—he seemed rather disoriented. His face turned completely red as he grabbed a handle and pulled himself upwards.

"Blast it," moaned Jones weakly. "Just as I had got that knee surgery."

"Get up, Citizen 512315," beeped a robotic voice. "No visible signs of knee surgery detected. Likely exaggeration and hyperbole emerging from a weak and sensitive being."

It was a Drone Robot Policinator 3001. By the looks of it, it was pristine, with bits of plastic wrapping still hanging around its sides. It stared into Jones's soul, like it was trying to gauge his feelings just by the movements of his corneas.

"I am not weak, you unfeeling buffoon," said Jones in a half-intimidating, half-doubtful manner. "Doubt you can even know what emotion is."

"Low intelligence detected," beeped the robot back. "Communication is likely to be futile. Analyse latest music-listening patterns."

"WAIT, PLEASE DON'T DO THAT!" pleaded Jones. He found himself pleading with metallic objects more often than he would have liked. At that moment, he

didn’t wonder why the machine had his music habits. All that mattered was that it did—and he would be thoroughly humiliated.

The machine took a moment to wind up and gain his records, mumbling something about having to deal with a multitude of idiocy on the daily.

While the robot prepared the humiliation, the man Jones had hit began to get over the initial shock. Not enough to call an ambulance, of course, but enough to make choice remarks that are not suitable for publication. In that speech, the man seemed to say something about Jones’s maternal family members, but more importantly, he said his name: Jacob.

By this time, the robot had compiled Jones's daily listening habits and began announcing them for clarity:

"SAYLOR TWIFT ALBUMS: 3 OF EVERY 5 HOURS LISTENED DAILY," said the robot calmly. But to Jones's ears, it seemed more akin to a shout.

"HAHAHA," bumbled Jacob in a rather stupid manner. "REAL UPSTANDING CHARACTER WE'VE GOT HERE."

The robot continued on, this time being more specific about exactly what Jones was listening to:

"WITHIN SAYLOR TWIFT ALBUMS, THE ALBUM *33* IS THE MOST LISTENED TO," said the robot. "LIKELY LACKS TASTE AND IS A GREATER THREAT THAN IMAGINED."

Jacob, in an almost contradictory manner, mumbled something about how it “wasn’t even her best work” and that he actually quite liked the 1948 album much more.

This was no comfort to Jones, who was barely processing the orchestral humiliation. How could the robot have possibly known—let alone tied that into the fact he had just hit a man with a two-tonne vehicle?

“Citizen, it holds relevance because of the types of people that like music. Like your liking of Saylor Twift. They have differing threat levels,” bumbled the robot in an almost paternal manner. “Just realise it’s for the greater good.”

“THE GREATER GOOD?” roared Jones, who had really begun to feel the pulled

muscle. “HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW ABOUT MY TASTE IN MUSIC? IF THE ACCUSATIONS—AND THEY ARE ACCUSATIONS—LAID OUT HERE ARE TRUE—”

“The greater good,” repeated the robot dully. It didn’t seem to modulate its voice.

Realising there was no use in arguing, Jones consented to being cuffed and taken. But he had not consented to being jeered at by his victim and his Emotional Support-A-Maton 2981s as he was dragged into a police vehicle.

“Wait,” asked Jones in a cautious manner, “what am I being charged with exactly? I mean, it isn’t legal if you don’t tell me or something, right?”

“Oh,” said the Policinator. “There’s a new ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy. Since you’ve asked, it’s reckless endangerment and hitting of a mildly ugly pedestrian with a grimace while having poor music taste. Will that be all?”

Ch-2: Mrs. Turnbutter

“THERE YOU GO, JOHNNY,” said Mrs. Turnbutter calmly as Jones drove away. “EVEN THAT BLITHERING IMBECILE JONES CAN SEE I’M IN THE RIGHT. IT’S A SILENT PROTEST.”

“SILENT PROTES—” Mr. Turnbutter stopped himself to compose. “My own assistant is telling me it’s best we have some distance.”

It was, in fact, not telling him to do that. It was actually telling him to communicate with her, and that nothing good would come of postponing the issues. But she didn’t know that, so it was okay.

He walked to his own car before she could get another word through, suffering through the same update that Jones did, before grumbling into the distance.

Mrs. Turnbutter paced around angrily and aimlessly for about five minutes before nominally getting dressed for work. She pulled her laptop onto her desk, lifted the top, and began checking her Macrohard Teems notifications.

It read something unimportant like:

“RE: latest losses, and booking errors requires immediate attention.”

So naturally, Mrs. Turnbutter chose to ignore it.

She moved her tab back to her personal assistant and began speaking.

“You really think he loves me?” asked Mrs. Turnbutter in an insincere, quaint manner.

“No,” replied the assistant. “I mean, given all you’ve told me…”

“Should I go investigating?” asked Mrs. Turnbutter, her eyes not lit up like a candle. “I mean, who knows what I’ll find.”

Her assistant made a sort of guttural sound, like it was clearing its throat but not quite disapproving of Mrs. Turnbutter’s actions.

“Checking your husband’s personal belongings—or implying to—could be a major violation of privacy. It could also weaken the trust one has in a relationship, and his ability to—”

She stopped her assistant in its tracks with the touch of a button.

“But it’s like you said. Given all that I’ve been told, it must be somewhat justifiable, right?” Turnbutter was less asking the assistant and more telling it what she wanted to hear. “I mean, on some level I must be entitled to know.”

“Given all that you have said, it’s probably a good idea,” said the assistant in a more cooperative manner. “However, it is like I said, any attempt to—”

“So it’s set!” said Mrs. Turnbutter. “I’ll snoop around. I can’t just sit around—it’d be a violation to my own principles.”

The assistant gave a drab, safe, corporate reply that didn't register in Mrs. Turnbutter's mind.

Despite this newfound enthusiasm, Turnbutter still felt a little hesitant. She was all ready to snoop but felt a slight inkling in the back of her mind that maybe—just maybe—she was being strung along somehow.

"Maybe," she thought to herself, "this is somehow morally wrong or something. Maybe I need to just—"

She stopped herself and decided to push it after her third meeting. It was with Barbara and the rest of the world's armpit hairs, so she would finally lose enough faith in the idea of morality as a construct to go through with it.

After a few hours, she clocked into the Teems meeting. As she did, her screen filled with a 3D projection of people's rooms, most of which were artificially generated anyway.

When Mrs. Turnbutter joined, a red-haired woman—perhaps in her late 30s—adjusted her glasses and began to speak.

"Well, as you are no doubt aware, we have had to lay off quite a few of our staff—about 50% of what was the Accountancy Efficiency Subcommittee," said Barbara. "No doubt the efficiency this'll create will free up much in our budget. It will be only m—"

"No need to be so bloody solemn, Barb," snapped a younger, blonde-haired woman in a high-pitched voice. "It's just blimen Dave."

Mrs. Turnbutter squinted a bit. The nametag read *Jackalee*.

“Getting tongue thrown by a junior employee is something I haven’t experienced in many years,” said Barbara, almost bored. “We shall circle back to this momentarily.”

Mrs. Turnbutter came to Jackalee’s assistance.

“Excuuuse me, Barbara,” she said, “but I think the way in which you have conducted yourself here is simply unacceptable. It probably violates section 235 of the ‘Mean Words Bad’ policy of the company.”

“OI!” said Jackalee suddenly. “Don’t you patronise me, you… you… over-vertebrate?”

Jackalee knew she didn’t like being patronised. But she also didn’t really think of an insult, so she let it stir in the air awkwardly in the hopes no one would notice.

Turnbutter was, of course, not pleased, and mumbled something about people “not being grateful to her and all she did” before pretending she hadn’t heard anything that had been said.

Barbara then broke the battle of the under-the-breath with a:

“Well, I’m sure HR will get involved if there are any issues,” before moving on to

explaining how the stock of Mongolian goat milk was going to change the way the spreadsheet formatting had to be done.

After the meeting had concluded, Mrs. Turnbutter shut her computer and began to look around the room suspiciously, as if every speck of dust could point towards... something.

She got up and began to examine every surface around her in an almost scrupulous manner, like there would be a punishment elsewhere were she to move on without investigating properly.

Turnbutter finished the hall, the kitchen, the living room, and finally made it to the shared bedroom.

As she walked in, she felt more uneasy than she had downstairs.

“Were I caught here,” she thought, “there would be no explanation in the seven seas that could possibly make me look any better.”

The room was plain and “minimalist” like the rest of the Turnbutter residence. All that was there in the bedroom was a nightstand, a cupboard, and a bed.

Turnbutter lifted up the lamp for some reason before placing it down and feeling rather silly for having done so.

She opened the drawer to find: a singular left-footed white heel.

It looked like one of her own, except… there was only a small difference—the slightest change that tipped her off.

It was bent leftwards.

Her heel had been bent rightwards after an unfortunate incident at a garden party. This wasn't hers. It was some other… harlot's.

A flurry of betrayed feelings ran through her heart. She turned around and walked out of the room in a brisk yet firm manner. She had to confront him somehow, in some way.

As she closed the door firmly behind her, she heard a voice.

“Darling?” asked Mr. Turnbutter, having seemingly appeared out of thin air. “You seem tense. Are you alright?”

Mrs. Turnbutter jumped six inches in the air before pulling herself together. She began to speak.

“I’ve found… it,” she said, raising her eyebrows and staring at his feet.

“It?” he asked. “What do you mean by it?”

They paused for a moment. Palpable awkwardness ebbed to and fro in the space between them.

“The heel. I have found the heel!” Her face contorted in disgust. “I don’t want to speak to you!”

“AGAIN?” Mr. Turnbutter cried. “YOU AREN’T EVEN GOING TO EXPLAIN?”

Mrs. Turnbutter covered her face and ran to the arms of her assistant—metaphorically speaking. She firmly shut the door behind her and began to clasp her screen to access her assistant for advice.

“I mean, what do I do?” she pleaded. “Now that I’ve discovered this, maybe divorce is in order? What could I possibly do?”

The assistant perked up immediately and began to speak.

“I have a lawyer service you can access,” it said. “Only 499 Sterling for a

consultation, and honestly, with all that you are going through, it's best that we get someone prim and proper, isn't it?"

Mrs. Turnbutter was still recovering from her shock. She swallowed the lump in her throat and opened her mouth to speak, with only a faint tinge of sound escaping from her voice box.

"I guess?"

Mr. Turnbutter suddenly burst into the room. His face was worn from stress, with his lips pouting outwards like a blobfish.

"Look, I'm sorry for demanding an answer," he said. "It was wrong of me, and I really should have tried to understand what you were talking about."

Silence filled the room like it had earlier. She examined him up and down, before realising that he had only a single shoe.

“I’m getting an attorney,” she said plainly. “But what’s with the shoe?”

“Long story,” he replied, staring at what remained of his shoe. “Wait—an attorney?”

Ch-3: The Turned Shoe

“Update initiating now, Mr Turnbladder.”

“Knew I shouldn’t have tried the voice activation on my username,” Mr Turnbutter grumbled to himself.

“Would you like to browse the news?” blinked the screens on his car.

“NO!” he said quickly. “N.O. I AM SPELLING IT N.O.”

“Would that be no to your no? Or is that a no to the question I said, and then no to what had been said earlier?”

“What question had you asked me earlier?” said Turbutter, using every muscle in his face and moving himself into a squint. “I mean, it barely makes sense, doesn’t it?”

“Would you like me to call an ambulance?” bumbled the car. “Being unable to follow basic conversation loops are a sign of having a stroke and/or low intelligence and comprehension skills.”

“I—no. That is final. No.” Mr Turnbutter lifted a finger in the air while sitting up in his seat in order to… assert dominance over an inanimate object.

“Driving to client 373 like requested, Turnbladder.”

Mr Turnbutter was glad to have been rid of the situation and just held up a thumbs up in the air while the car moved onto the road.

The journey was smooth, albeit, like most people, Turnbutter was perpetually in a bad mood, which was the only thing Turnbutter could find himself focusing on. He checked his notes for the property he was going to sell, as realtors tend to do. 4 bedroom.

Recently renovated (a painting had been moved from one area to another). And it was one of only 5 homes that had been built in England in the last… 20 years.

“10 million Sterling?” he thought to himself. “I mean, it doesn’t have consistent water, electricity, or a roof to speak of, so maybe 15 million Sterling might be more palatable to em.”

As he pulled into the driveway of the house, a shabbily dressed, brown haired man came to greet him and open his door.

“Turnbutter!” the man said excitedly. “You aren’t late! Hell must have frozen over finally!”

“Haha,” Turnbutter said unconvincingly. “You know me so well, don’t you, Gary.”

“Of course, Turnbutter,” said Gary in a condescending way. “Better than anyone else. Now, how much do you reckon we

can get this one for, eh, Turnbutter? 30 million Sterling?"

Mr Turnbutter tried to hide how annoyed he was with Gary, but failed to do so, having it manifest as a fake smile—the kind where the eyes wrinkle together. As he got out of the car, he managed to loosen his shoe, but he ignored it and continued on.

"Very funny, Gary, you are a very funny person," he said, attempting to imitate the playful nature of his counterpart. "But I'm thinking more around half of that? I mean, it is just a house and not something expensive like toothpaste or something along those lines, is it?"

Gary squinted unconvincingly again. He raised his head to look into the distance,

before focusing his eyes back unto Turnbutter.

“Look, I didn’t want to be the kind of person to tell you this, but my personal assistant thinks that it’s somewhere closer to 50 million Sterling,” said Gary in his standard condescending manner. “But I’m willing to come down to 30 million Sterling if that’s what it’ll take.”

“Right,” said Turnbutter. “I am a professional at this though. I do this to put food into my belly. Plus, my assistant said it’s 15 million Sterling, so I think you really should try and come down a bit.”

“Only house built in a 100 km radius for decades,” said Gary. “C’mon now, it can’t be that cheap, now can it.”

Suddenly, an ambulance emerged from around the corner, its lights flashing at full intensity as it headed directly towards the house. The sirens yelped for everyone in the area to remain calm and to avoid panicking.

“Huh,” said Gary. “Another one. I wonder who it’s going to nick now.”

“Wait, have there been multiple ambulances coming here today?” asked Turnbutter in a surprisingly calm manner.

“Yep,” replied Gary. “Third one this hour. Anyhow, as we were—”

“MR TURNBLADDER!” screamed the ambulance. “WE ARE HERE TO TAKE YOU IN FOR POSSIBLE SCHIZOPHRENIC BEHAVIOUR AND THE DANGER YOU MAY

CAUSE TO OTHER PEOPLE. KINDLY COOPERATE WITH OUR AGENTS AS THEY TAKE YOU TO THE AUTOMATIC END CHAMBER."

Turnbutter stood there absolutely still. He knew his car had called the ambulance somehow. No one else in the whole county called him Turnbladder. The only exception was his old high school bully, and he was fairly certain that he didn't have the literary capacity to call an ambulance.

"The automatic end machine?" Turnbutter called back cautiously to the ambulance as it approached the pair. "Isn't that a little... excessive?"

The ambulance stopped at a distance of 25 metres, before a large, crimson automaton left the back of it and put its

feet on the road. The robot began to address Turnbutter.

“Likelihood of insanity increased to 300%,” it said to itself. “Everyone knows it’s more efficient this way.”

With the gravity of the situation having finally reached Turnbutter’s synapses, he jerked backwards in an awkward motion in order to half-escape, half-freeze from the approaches of the automaton.

This was a bad decision. Although, come to think of it, it was hardly a decision and more of a case of poor genetic survival instincts or something of that sort.

Turnbutter’s recently loosened shoe flew immediately at the automaton, its bottom side making immediate contact with the top of the robot, where its head is meant to be.

“Warning... pollen detected...” said the automaton, with the pitch of its sound slowly reducing as the seconds went by. “Pollen allergy response in effect... releasing epipen, insane citizen kindly use epipen and save me.”

At this juncture, Turnbutter turned to Gary, eyes widened, as if he expected him to do something in this situation.

“HOW AM I TO KNOW WHAT TO DO,” said Gary. “I DIDN’T KNOW THESE BLIMEN THINGS ARE ALLERGIC TO BLIMEN POLLEN.”

“THINK FAST,” said Turnbutter, now visibly turning red with alarm. “YOU HOLD IT DOWN AND I’LL ADMINISTER THE EPIPEN.”

Gary leapt towards the robot and held it down. He quickly handed the epipen that emerged from its metallic shoulder to Turnbutter, who began placing it near the neck of the robot.

“WRONG NECK, IDIOT,” it blurted. “OTHER NECK DOWN THING LONG ARM MIDDLE?” It took its heavy metallic arm and pointed towards where it wanted Turnbutter to place the epipen.

With a swift movement of his fingers, Turnbutter opened the epipen and then jammed it straight into the arm.

As it entered the bot’s bloodstream, the mechanisms seemed to act in a more stable manner, allowing the bot to quickly bring itself up.

“I am the Ambulenco Bot 3000,” said the bot in an almost cheery manner, “and I am suing you for malice and attempted harm caused by an assault with poor footwear. Under the Poor Footwear Act of 2029, I will see you in a court of tort. Oh wait, those have been abolished—my bad!”

“SUE ME???” screamed Turnbutter. “YOU ONLY TRIED TO SEND ME TO THE AUTOMATIC END MACHINE 5 MINUTES AGO AND NOW YOU’RE ACTING AS IF I AM IN THE WRONG? HAVE YOU MAYBE CONSIDERED THAT IT’S—I DON’T KNOW—BAD JU-JU TO SUE SOMEONE WHO JUST SAVED YOUR ROBOT EXISTENCE?”

“Kindly maintain silence,” said the Ambulenco. “You are lucky I am taking a

mental health break; otherwise I would have taken you in now."

After hearing this, Turnbutter made a grimace, before standing up to collect his shoe.

"Hold on now," said the Ambulenco. "That's a part of the evidence. I'll be taking that with me."

Ch-4: The Legal Offices of the Big Company

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

The sound of a prompt being answered flew across the offices of *the very big law company London.co*.

Henry Strongman checked the response, being careful to turn off the AI to avoid extras on the billable microsecond:

Mr Harper Jones
Aged 53
Alleged Crime: the reckless endangerment and hitting of a mildly ugly pedestrian with a grimace while having poor music taste. Section 35.5 of the Bad Music Taste Act of 2027.

Applicable cases: *John v John* (2043), *Jeff v Jeff* (2028).

He turned away and looked through his window. The other building on Canary Wharf rose into the sky like broken pieces of glass glistening in the shining sun.

“Out, Harry,” said a voice at the doorway. “You aren’t getting this desk for another week. Stop fantasising.”

It was Arthur, his current boss at the *very big law company London.co*, and his soon-to-be ex-boss as Henry took up his position. The moment he heard him, Harry turned around in a swift flourish of a motion.

“I’m very sorry, sir,” said Harry nervously. “I was just trying to run this communicae prompt on the recent Jones case, is all.”

“Be careful on those billable milliseconds,” warned Arthur. “Anything more than what’s required and we’ll start to bill you for them.”

Hearing this, Henry's entire face turned pale. He stood up and began to move towards Arthur.

"Back to my own desk then," he said. "I'll see you at our 3 o'clock to discuss the transition that's going to happen here."

"So we will," said Arthur, raising his eyebrows.

Henry briskly made it to his messy cubicle before setting himself down to research his case.

"*John v John* (2043)," he wrote. "Case of the man and the policeman who believed he was an automaton."

Henry began wondering how he would be able to do Jones's case. So far, the government hadn't really legislated on it, and judges barely bothered with AI cases in the first place, believing that AI and electricity would be a passing fad anyway.

Awful thoughts entered his mind—things that could possibly jeopardise his recent promotion to senior junior assistant to the assistant to the head of the branch room. This included ideas like *what if I procrastinated* and *maybe I need to take time off*. But he dismissed them in favour of endlessly staring into the piece of paper.

The dark blue letters of the company logo stared back at him, compelling him to remain firmly seated in his chair.

In a need to feel efficient, he began peering through the PDF of the Blackslaw Dictionary in order to find words that might pertain to Jones's case. While this brought him the illusion of being a worker ant, the mind-numbing boredom of a case that was really not about anything revolutionary made him focus on the exact legal definition of Jacob's insults—which, even in a more strictly technical sense, are unsuitable for publication.

The hour hand jumped a few degrees, which eventually prompted Henry to get up and move to the break room to pretend to continue his work while speaking to his colleagues.

Before even seeing anyone, the sound of laughter leapt across the turning before the room.

“SO HER EVIDENCE IS A BLIMEN SHOE THEN,” yelled the voice of an AI assistant. “A SHOE, A RANDOM SHOE, AND SHE WANTS TO GO ON CHARGES OF ADULTERY FOR THAT? LOVELY.”

Henry made the turning and entered the break room. As he moved his head to deduce where the noise came from, a plump, burly man with dark hair came into view.

“Marvin!” said Henry. “Back at it again, are we?”

“YUP!” said Marvin, his gravelly voice covering the room. “You wouldn’t believe the client I’ve got this time, Hen’y. Have a look at the case files. I’ve been spewing my guts out over it all morning.”

Henry slowly walked over to Marvin's computer screen before gently peering over his shoulder to look at what was displayed:

Molly Turnbutter
Aged 48
Claiming charges of adultery, evidence includes a singular shoe and off-choice comments.

"I MEAN CAN YOU BELIEVE IT," said Marvin, jeering at the screen. "There isn't any way she's going to get this past the judges, is there."

"I don't know," said Henry. "Depending on how she plays herself she could surprise us all. Has she applied for one of us or the new bots?"

“New bots,” said Marvin, rolling his eyes and moving half his face upwards. “I mean, can you believe relying on an emotional support buddy that much, huh.”

“Hmmmmmm.” Henry stared at his tablet screen, then stared at Marvin’s, then at the both of them.

“I don’t think so,” was the phrase he decided was safest. “When is this one coming in, anyway?”

“In about 20 minutes, I think,” said Marvin, staring at his watch. “Would you like to come with? It’d make it way less boring, and we can combine our nutter clients together.”

“Wait,” said Henry, raising an eyebrow. “You’ve heard of the legendary Jones?”

“Of course I have,” said Marvin with a chuckle. “I’d be surprised if there were worms that hadn’t heard of him. I mean, he’s the most mundane boring case assigned in years—that’s what’s so unique!”

“So it’s set,” said Henry. “We’ll combine the both of them.”

The both of them crammed together on one end of a desk in a small office, staring at the clock. Their new bot—the one booked by Mrs. Turnbutter—sat quietly next to them, emitting an electric hum throughout the space as it charged its batteries.

“A Mrs. Turnbutter and Mr. Jones here to see Mr. Strongman and Mr. Brown,” beeped an automated voice over the

intercom. “Please take the next right out of the elevator. You’ll know it’s them because they look like they don’t want to be there.”

The pair strolled into the cramped office alongside Henry and Marvin. As they sat down, they glanced confused looks at each other before turning their attention to the two in front of them.

“I thought I would have a robot expert?” said Mrs. Turnbutter in a matter-of-fact way. “If that’s the case, what are the two of you doing here?”

“We are legally responsible for damages,” said Marvin in an annoyed manner. “So I’m here to babysit this one to make sure it doesn’t tell you to do anything stupid.”

Mr. Jones squinted at the robot and then back at Mrs. Turnbutter, half in awe and half confused by her choice of legal advice.

He opened his mouth to speak, then chose to close it without saying anything.

“As for you,” said Henry, turning to Mr. Jones, “you’ve got yourself into quite a lot of hot water.”

“OI!” said Mr. Jones. “It’s not my fault that I was misled and what not. In fact most of it isn’t my faul—”

“I’d be careful making statements,” interrupted Marvin. “The amount of privilege you have with us has been significantly reduced, so don’t incriminate yourself.”

“THEN HOW ARE YOU POSSIBLY MEANT TO DO THE BEST JOB YOU CAN THEN?” Mr. Jones began to roar. “I MEAN THERE’S NO POINT AT THAT POINT, IS THERE? YOU CAN’T DO YOUR JOBS PROPERLY WITHOUT ME TELLING YOU, BUT I CAN’T TELL YOU ANYTHING, CAN I?”

Jones quickly became aware of how loud he was being and brought his voice down. The four of them sat in awkward silence for five minutes till a *TING* came to the rescue.

“Full battery reached,” said the automaton. “Hello, I am the Lawyer Bot 3976. Please enter your fmail details so I can connect to your assistant.”

Marvin brought a pad for Mrs. Turnbutter to fill. She quickly logged into the system and waited for the lawyer-bot to respond.

Its head moved up and began to speak to her.

“HEYYYYYY MRS TURNBLADDERRR,” said the robot. “SO NICE TO FINALLY MEET YOU.”

“Ughhhhhhhhh,” said Mrs. Turnbutter, groaning in anger. “BLOODY AUTOCORRECT.”

“I’VE LOOKED OVER YOUR CASE,” said the robot. “WHILE THERE MAY BE SOME SLIGHT

INADEQUACIES—”

At this point, while the bot was speaking, Marvin shot it a confused look, expecting it to reply for some reason.

"I'M SURE WE CAN GET IT DONEEEEE. ARE YOU READY."

"Yes, YES," Mrs. Turnbutter squealed, placing an emphasis on the second *yes*. "I JUST CAN'T WAIT. TAKE THAT, JOHNNY."

"Hold on," said Jones, on his way to ask a question he was about to regret. "Are you divorcing Johnny? Do I finally get silence?"

"Yes I am," she said in a matter-of-fact manner. "Wait, what do you mean silence? So you think we are too loud?"

Realising the situation that was about to unfold, Marvin quickly interrupted her.

"Anyyyyyway, let's keep it cool, coooool," he said, cringing at himself as he said it. "Since Mr. Beep Boop hasn't done anything technically illegal, I think it's

alright to go. Just connect it to your assistant and things should be fine. Now, I've got my newest season of *Marvin's Show: A Brilliant AI Mystery* to catch up on. Chop chop."

He quickly escorted Mrs. Turnbutter out of the room, leaving only Henry and Jones in the room.

"So..." said Henry awkwardly. "Neighbours, huh."

"Cut the blimen chit chat," said Jones in an insensitive way. "I've got a meeting to attend to soon, otherwise I'll get replaced the way 'brilliant' people like you are."

Jones made an air-quotes hand gesture to indicate his "sincerity."

Henry puffed his chest like a child before speaking.

"I'll have you know only junior staff are being replaced," said Henry. "I'll be absolutely untouched after my promotion."

Jones just stared at him like he'd asked to borrow a toothbrush, before swiftly changing the topic.

"Alright, just tell me about my case," he said. "What do my odds look like? And be frank."

"Well," said Henry grumpily, "you assaulted a man while being in a candy fantasy and having poor taste. I've looked over the cases and legislation, and nothing seems to be there exactly. You've got a fresh slate."

Henry tried to smile to get Jones to be a bit more friendly, but it was no use.

"What about what I was charged under?" said Jones. "How can they nick me if there is no basis?"

"Ah," said Henry. "The real difference lies in the fact that we don't know exactly what caused the crash just yet. If it was the car, then you are golden. If you are at fault, then well... I don't know."

He stared into Jones's eyes, expecting him to give him the answer.

"What," said Jones. "Flee the country? Run away?"

"NO," said Henry. "Not even in joke. They've got trial in absence now, efficiency and what not. No, get it done before the Happy Party tries to pass that piece they've been trying to today. Who knows what kind of anti-human garbage they've slapped in there."

"The Happy Party will be trying to pass something today?" asked Mr. Jones, leaning his thick neck forward while squinting at Henry. "What, the numbnuts in the TV?"

“The very same,” Henry said grimly. “Don’t you read the news?”

Ch-5: The Legislative

“Your principal private secretary, Minister.”

A door swung open, allowing a man with partly grey hair in a well-groomed suit to walk into a well-lit, fancy office. He held with him an arm of files, which pushed against his long, thin arms.

“Charlie!!” cried a stout grey man sitting at a desk at the end of the room. “Person of the hour.”

“Just happy to help, Minister Bernaard,” said Charlie, holding an uncomfortable smile. “Here is the final draft of the legislation we are going to—erm, what’s the word you used—spring on them before they know their trousers are off?”

“Ah, wonderful,” said Bernaard. “Like a sherry in the afternoon. Let me have a look.”

Bernaard brought forth his glasses before looking into the paper. His eyes lit up brighter and brighter as he read more of the legislation in front of him, before closing it halfway and looking up at Charlie.

“I know I have three beautiful children,” said Bernaard, taking out a handkerchief,

“but this is the most incredible moment of my life.”

He held a finger up to indicate that Charlie wasn’t meant to speak, before wiping his eyes with the cloth. Bernaard then brought it down and nodded at Charlie to speak.

“So do I bring these to the other departments then, Minister?” Charlie asked. “I mean, they’ve got to have some sort of an advance warning.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Charlie,” snapped Bernaard. “Give them an advance? This isn’t a birthday party. It’s a surprise attack. Did the Japanese squak about Pearl Harbou?”

“Well, Minister, they did actually send a declaration of war right before the bombs fell,” said Charlie. “So in a sens—”

Bernaard tapped his desk to get Charlie’s attention, before making a motion for him to close his mouth.

“And that went brilliantly, didn’t it,” said Bernaard in a faux-sympathetic, sarcastic manner. “You haven’t told anyone, have you? This better have gone through the correct channels, if you catch my drift.”

“Everything you asked, Minister,” said Charlie enthusiastically. “The quiet removal of the human concessions. The very slight langauge tweaks were done via hand before the files were switched on the server. Any grammar checks were done by personal assistant, so anyone from any other department shan’t know.”

“Not even the Department of Watching?” asked Bernaard. “You do realise they only have their jobs because they are the biggest tattlers in the country, don’t you, Charlie…”

“Wait, the Department of Watching…” Charlie trailed off momentarily to gather his thoughts. It seemed like he was pondering life, but he was really wondering why screens were made square when the human eye was round. “How was I supposed to get it past them? I mean, they do look at things that come in print, don’t they? And besides, aren’t you glad? At least you can claim some tinge of legitimacy, can’t you?”

Bernaard turned red. He took a deep breath while bringing his fingers to his nose, before widening his eyes and staring at Charlie.

“There is a ‘don’t open confidential very important’ check,” mumbled Bernaard in an almost incoherent way. “But you definitely listened to everything I asked, Charlie… Everyyyything.”

“Tell me, Charlie, whose name goes onto the pages when you bring them into print?” asked Bernaard with a smile and a changed demeanour.

“Well, mine, sir,” replied Charlie. “But I did say that you told me to put them in when I brought them to print.”

“And given all you know…” continued Bernaard, “would you say that the PM is particularly good under pressure? The sort of man who can answer questions in a jiffy? Especially if he has someone to blame?”

“Of course not, sir. I mean, we’ve al—” The truth suddenly dawned on Charlie. His eyes looked as though they would leap from their sockets onto the floor.

“So, both the hen and the egg to the soup, it is.” Bernaard looked at his watch. “It’s too late now. PMQ’s should be starting soon. I guess we’ll have to convince him after the fact like we usually do.”

“Using our silver tongues, are we, Minister?” asked Charlie.

“I’ll be,” said Bernaard. “You just have to sit there looking like yourself. Now come along, we have a show to take in. Den of hungry opposition members eats sitting prime minister.”

“ORDER! ORDER IN THE HOUSE!” yelled the Speaker. “The RIGHT HONORABLE PRIME MINISTER.”

A tall, timid-looking man rose from his seat, holding his ledger firm while speaking into the microphone.

“Mr Speaker,” said the man, calm gravel-esque voice, “the bill before the right honorable House is a compromise, bringing forth consensus decision-making that our infant party was founded to make. Now, if it’s somehow possible, does the right honorable opposition have any sort of objection?”

A hand rose quickly into the air, prompting the calm man to sit down.

“The right honorable Leader of the Opposition, Sir David,” yelled the Speaker.

“When the people of Britain elected a prime minister,” said the man, “we’d have at least hoped he’d understood the words that came out of his mouth.”

The House of Commons erupted into laughter suddenly.

“Bu—but that’s ridiculous,” came a meek mumble from the PM. “We came to a compromise the standing committee agreed to—”

“AGREED TO CHANGING TERMS AT THE LAST MINUTE?” roared Sir David. “TRIGGER-HAPPY IS THE ONLY THING THIS GOVERNMENT HAS ACHIEVED!”

“ORDAAAA!” yelled the Speaker. “ORDAAAAAA!”

The House settled down momentarily, before a member of the opposition raised his hand.

“The right honorable James James, representing Islington East.”

“I think this honorable House is to be in a state of concern. Either our prime minister has no capacity for compromise and lies at the fringes of our society, or he is the kind of individual that fails to grasp the idea of compromise altogether,” said

James James slyly. “Whatever is the case, I believe the current government has much to think about, has it not?”

The prime minister raised his hand again before standing to speak.

“Look,” he said, “there has been a terrible misunderstanding. This is not the legislation we wanted to pass. I shall conduct a full internal inquiry and find those who are responsible for this mayhem. Under no circumstances should a healthy society see fit to permit this lunacy.”

An audible chorus of tsks and groans filled the halls of Westminster as he said this, prompting the prime minister to sit down.

“The prime minister has been suspended for unparlimentary behaviour,” said the Speaker finally. “You are only meant to speak when spoken to.”

Bernaard and Charlie rushed back to the offices of MOJO in Whitehall before closing the door to speak in private.

“That does it,” said Charlie. “We are simply to fade into the cycle of nature. After being eaten by Parliament, Prime Minister Alsbury is going to eat us.”

“Firstly, Charlie, that’s not how the food chain works. This is more of a reverse food chain,” said Bernaard, annoyed. “Secondly, there is a tried and tested method used by most everyone in every situation when it seems that all is lost: blame something else.”

“THAT’S BRILLIANT,” exclaimed Charlie. “But what could we possibly blame?”

“I was rather hoping you had an answer to that,” mumbled Bernaard. “At which stage did you leave the crumbs for Tattle and the gang to pick up?”

“That would be in the final drafting stage, Minister,” replied Charlie. “How much time do you reck’on that would buy us?”

“Eh, a good 40 minutes,” said Bernaard. “These inquiries work backwards.”

“40 minutes?” hissed Charlie. “That’s practically no time at all!”

“Au contrarie, that’s plenty of time to find something in the papers to pin the donkey on,” said Bernaard.

As he finished this sentence, Bernaard scrambled through the room, attempting to find a screen to view the news on. Under a nearby cushion he found a small black tablet, on which he began to scroll the headlines.

“Let’s see here,” thought Bernaard loudly. “...Something about fast fashion. Boring. How there is a crime wave. Boring. Oh, this is the interview I did—don’t I look handsome.”

“Hmph,” coughed Charlie, attempting to get his attention. “We could say the last-minute changes came as a response to the recent ISAROBOT case. In that, we were inspired by the work that was done

and how a greater reliance on technology was now justified."

"Incredible," said Bernaard. "So your plan is—and correct me if I am mistaken—to pin the blame on the success of an inanimate object? And you believe the prime minister will buy that?"

"What makes you think otherwise?" asked Charlie.

Bernaard thought for a moment before looking up at Charlie.

"I know I'm forbidden a relationship with my principal private secretary," said Bernaard, "but I could genuinely kiss you right now. This is brilliant."

Suddenly, a nearby screen began to ring loudly, prompting Charlie and Bernaard to

investigate it. Charlie answered it before putting it to his ear, then put it down and covered the mouthpiece.

“It’s Number 10,” he said. “They got to us faster than expected.”

Ch-6 the executive

“So we’ve got our stories clear haven’t we Charlie?” said Bernaard “ We walk in, congratulate the prime minister on a job

well done, and then talk about solutions right?"

"Of course Minister, have I ever let you down" said Charlie as the pair approached the door to no 10

"Not in the last 30 minutes, no," said Bernaard. "Happy we cleared that up."

The two were led through corridor after corridor along the passages of No. 10 by an escort. Door after door, they watched as the looks on the doormen's faces grew more smirk-like.

At the final door, the two of them took a deep breath before nodding at the doorman to swing it open.

“The Minister for Judicial Objects, Prime Minister,” said the doorman as he revealed the PM’s office.

As the pair walked in, they spotted Alysbury staring out of the window at the view of London with his hands behind his back. Alysbury turned around wearing an expression that was a mix of fear and determination. However, upon making eye contact with both of them, the determination quickly dissipated.

“Mr. Prime Minister,” started Bernaard, “to what do we owe the pleasur—”

“Nothing,” Alysbury interrupted. “There is no pleasure in this moment. I was made a buffoon of in Parliament. Had I not been suspended, it is likely I would have been given the boot. So I ask—who is responsible?”

At this point Charlie attempted to speak, but Bernaard silenced him with a tug of the shoulder.

“I beg your pardon, Prime Minister?” said Bernaard.

“Who is responsible, Bernaard? I want to know now.” Alysbury attempted to emphasise the *now* in that sentence, but ended it prematurely and produced a whimper instead.

“Responsible for what, Prime Minister?” said Bernaard. “And did you say you were made a buffoon of?”

“Was I not?” asked Alysbury, stressing his face, which deepened his wrinkles. Alysbury was not an old man, but when he stressed his face he looked as though he could’ve fathered the trees.

“Of course not, Minister,” said Bernaard slyly. “I think you quite held your own given the circumstances. I’m sure the voters are going to be sympathetic when the ‘whole story’ comes out, won’t they?”

Hearing this, Charlie began to sweat profusely. *What on earth did he mean by the whole story? Was he about to out himself?* In an attempt to quell Bernaard’s self-destructive instinct, he placed an ever-wetting hand onto his shoulder.

“Whatever do you mean by the whole story, Bernaard?” said Alysbury curiously.

“I mean the change in legislation based on the change in circumstance, of course,” said Bernaard. “The recent ISAROBOT case called for it. The brave men and women in the civil service took it upon themselves to rectify it.”

“Really?” said Alysbury. “Do go on.”

His demeanour shifted from that of a serious, upstanding individual to an excited schoolboy.

“Well,” continued Bernaard, “given the recent success of the newest ISAROBOT project, we believed that the opposition might exploit the legislation to slander the government for inefficiency.”

“Really?” said Alysbury, bringing his face upwards. “But aren’t they pro-human or something?”

“Only in principle, Prime Minister,” said Bernaard in his signature manner. “They are pro-human because they are anti-human.”

“I beg your pardon, Bernaard—you are going to have to elaborate,” said Alysbury, scrunching his face inward as he spoke.

“They are only doing it because they think the efficiency won’t work, and that it would get votes,” said Bernaard. “But you and I both know that an increase in this technology is vital for a better human existence, don’t we?”

“That’s right,” said Alysbury. “The people on the luxury yacht with the lobster were quite convincing. I was actually quite a staunch anti-AI activist, but those arguments were a little too convincing now that I think back on it.”

“Hmph,” coughed Bernaard. “Exactly, Prime Minister. And since they lack the insight we do, they tend to be misinformed a lot of the time.”

“Misinformed…” Alysbury trailed off into the distance. “Wait—then how come they always bring in these expert opinions? The opinions of ‘society’s most intelligent’?”

“PRIME MINISTER,” exclaimed Bernaard in a dramatic fashion. “Surely you aren’t giving credibility to those cretins, are you? Were I a more cruel man, I would have ridiculed you by now.”

“But Bernaard,” said Alysbury, “aren’t these men some of the most learned in Britain? There’s lots we have to learn from them.”

“Having a fancy piece of paper doesn’t make one qualified,” snapped Bernaard. “If these men were so truly qualified, they wouldn’t be working for pennies after

spending hundreds of thousands on a degree. They'd be working for us."

"Isn't that a conflict of interest?" said Alysbury, scrunching his face further. "I mean, if we control their salaries, won't it be in their interest to please us?"

"Well," said Bernaard with a smile, "principled men make principled paupers. Besides, it's like I said—why would they? They have no reason not to join us."

"I suppose you are right," said Alysbury. "Y'know, this whole party business has been a hassle, Bernaard."

"Really?" said Bernaard, shooting a smile at Charlie. "How so, Prime Minister? Is there any way we can help?"

“I don’t know,” replied Alysbury. “I mean, a newly established party—whatever were we thinking? I mean the dissolution, the resolution… honestly, Bernaard, what’s the point of it all?”

“I didn’t study theology, Prime Minister,” said Bernaard. “But I can tell you the point is to prevent the opposition.”

“Prevent them from what, Bernaard?” asked Alysbury. “I mean, if it weren’t for those brave civil service members, where would I be now? Speaking of which—who were those civil service members?”

“A double!” said Bernaard excitedly. “Alright, so it’s to prevent them. No real reason—just to prevent them today, prevent them tomorrow. I mean, more

pro-human legislation? Wouldn't that be a disaster?"

Alysbury nodded along with what Bernaard was saying, as though he was absorbing every letter he pronounced.

"As for those brave civil service members," continued Bernaard, "they weren't really from the civil service. Me and Charlie here orchestrated the whole thing. Honestly, we just didn't want to seem pompous."

A sickly smile came over Charlie. It looked sickly because he didn't know whether he was supposed to smile. He got all of the credit yet did none of the effort. But he knew better than to question Lady Fate when she threw him a bone.

“How wonderful of you,” said Alysbury with an ear-to-ear grin. “You should always declare your achievements. How else am I to reward certain people in a cabinet reshuffle if I’m not ‘properly informed’?”

While doing the air quotes for *properly informed*, Alysbury hadn’t realised that in a span of 20 minutes he had been completely duped. A mere half hour ago he was ready to strangle any person who had even breathed of the changes, and here he was promising Bernaard the earth, the heavens, and an ageing Tesco in Brighton.

“You know, Bernaard,” said Alysbury, “we really must celebrate this. Do a victory lap. And I have just the idea.”

“What is that, Minister?” said Bernaard. At this point he was willing to go along with anything, lest Alysbury use what weighed down his shoulders.

“Give that ISAROBOT thing-a-me-bob a day of cases!” said Alysbury. “What’s the harm? We’ve got to show how brilliant it is.”

The moment the frequencies were translated into Bernaard’s mind as English, he turned pale, yellow, blue, and every other colour in existence.

“Are you quite sure, Prime Minister?” said Charlie. “I mean, you do realis—”

Bernaard stamped his foot on Charlie’s.

“Of course, Minister!” said Bernaard enthusiastically. “Somewhere a few weeks down the line? A little while later?”

“No, no, no,” insisted Alysbury. “This has to be done *now*.”

His finger pointed towards the floor to signify urgency, but Bernaard couldn’t help but realise that that’s also where graves are kept.

“But Prime Minister,” squealed Bernaard, “isn’t that a little courageous? I mean, we just had an incident with the vote already. And besides—Mercury is in retrograde.”

“Please, Bernaard,” said Alysbury dismissively. “There is no way you genuinely believe in astronomy.”

“Astrology,” corrected Charlie—before getting a secondary stamping from Bernaard.

Alysbury frowned, then continued as though he had heard nothing.

“The vote is exactly why we should do it now,” he emphasised. “I mean, there is no time like the present to address mishaps. What is it they say? Raunch is a dish best served warm?”

Charlie, realising his foot had gone through enough abuse, decided not to say anything. He did, however, shoot Bernaard a look, before getting a disengaged assurance signal, after which he turned away.

“Of course, Prime Minister,” Bernaard said in a low voice. “As you please. Would you like full credit?”

“I can’t, Bernaard, you know that,” said Alysbury. “I mean, all of you at the Ministry of Judicial Objects have worked tirelessly. No—we’ll have to share it.”

Bernaard began counting all the times he proclaimed that he was an atheist, or that God was simply an invention of the weak-minded to hide their incompetencies, before staring upwards in a feeling of utter terror and guilt.

“To prepare for tomorrow,” said Alysbury, “we must meet ISAROBOT now. I mean, it’s 5:30 already.”

“NO,” yelled Charlie. “Erm—I mean, ISAROBOT is going under some maintenance. You can meet him in the morning, right before, Minister, if all things are well.”

“When,” corrected Alysbury. “*When*. I mean it needs to be tomorrow, it can’t be anytime else. I’ll leave you two to it then. Oh, and Bernaard—see me about the reshuffle, will you.”

“Yes, I’ll be sure to,” said Bernaard. “Let’s leave, Charlie. The Prime Minister is a busy man.”

Both Charlie and Bernaard rushed out of the room, retracing their steps down the corridor, before Charlie pulled Bernaard into a corner to speak.

“Does he… not know that ISAROBOT isn’t real?” asked Charlie.

Ch-7: The Judiciary

The pair made it to Islington North at 7 o'clock. On the way there, neither one of them was in a conversational mood. The air was filled with a palpable awkward silence, although that could have been the smell of an expired air freshener.

Eventually, the car pulled over to a drab, boring building.

"So what's our plan here exactly?" asked Charlie as the pair left the car.

"Remember those personal assistant things everyone's obsessed with?" said Bernaard. "Well, if it can break apart my second marriage, surely it can build us an actual ISAROBOT. I mean, after all, it can't be that hard."

This was the largest understatement of the century. Decades later, a psychiatrist only a few doors down would be hearing about this, but for now they, and Bernaard, were oblivious.

The two walked into a dingy government office, where they greeted the reception and walked towards a small, cramped room.

The room itself was nothing extraordinary. It had lights, though none of them worked, and a workstation along with a computer and a small metallic box. It looked like the kind of automaton that the government used for cleaning; it was shaped like a rubbish bin with arms on either side and a voice box.

“Time to get to work,” said Bernaard. “Now, Charlie, you have a personal assistant software, don’t you? Take it out. Let’s see what it can do.”

“Minister, are you sure this is one of your… better plans?” asked Charlie. “I mean, it took everyone at the fire department—before it got merged at least—15 years and millions of pounds before they built functioning robot software for their department. Besides, why can’t we have a local judge do it and say the robot did it like last time?”

“Charlie, oh naive Charlie,” said Bernaard, almost exhausted. “You don’t genuinely believe it actually took that long, do you, for the software. Also, Alysbury will probably ruin it all by being there in person, so that’s out of the question.”

“Why, if not for the technological jump?” said Charlie. “Was there some other reason it took ages?”

“Obviously,” said Bernaard. “They were robbing it both ways—both with the private lads paying them off to slow it down, and their own stalling techniques. The longer the project went on, the more salaries they get. It’s simple math.”

“No, I think that’s more logic, Minister,” said Charlie, lifting his neck forward to emphasise his point.

Bernaard rolled his eyes before speaking in a more serious tone.

“Look, Charlie,” he said, breathing in deeply, “just take out your assistant before I inevitably send you to the

automatic end machine for poorly done paperwork."

Upon hearing this, Charlie quickly took out his phone and engaged his personal assistant.

"Hello," Charlie said. "How are you?"

"I'm very well, thank you," said the assistant. "Are you still having issues with your plastic cravings, or have those been resolved?"

Bernaard burst into laughter, turning red—almost scarlet—in the process.

"Fancy my ballpoint?" Bernaard asked Charlie, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“Come to think of it, my sleeve’s got a bit of plastic as well.”

Charlie stared at Bernaard in embarrassment for a few moments. As he was coming up with a solid justification for his previous problem, the assistant spoke.

“Is that Mr. Bernaard, worker at the Ministry of Judicial Objects?” asked the assistant. “Your aid in this matter helps make the service better for everyone, so please do let us know.”

Without thinking, Charlie pressed yes.

“WHAT ARE YOU THINKING,” said Bernaard. “DON’T YOU CARE ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY? YOU MANIAC.”

“Character identification confirmed,” rang the assistant. “Unnecessary paranoia is a signature: Mr. Bernaard, working at the Ministry of Judicial Objects, living at 351 Kensington Avenue…”

Bernaard swallowed the contents of his mouth. After blinking several times, he shot Charlie’s phone a stern stare while he processed this information. Unfortunately for him, the assistant didn’t seem to care.

“Good evening, Mr. Bernaard,” said the assistant. “Would you like to talk about your obsession with stealing other people’s clothes and crying about it, or your current plastic-consuming obsession?”

Bernaard turned scarlet, his eyes widening. The need for processing this

information suddenly evaporated, and he began to yell.

“SILENCE, YOU INSOLENT FOOL,” he said. “LIBEL IS A SERIOUS CRIME.”

“Actually,” said the assistant calmly, “the AI Protection Act protects us from this—an act drafted by yourself. Also, it is slander; libel is written.”

Meanwhile, Charlie couldn’t contain his laughter and began giggling. If it was a competition between his willpower to keep his job and the urge to laugh, the laugh would have won tenfold.

“Y’know, dearie,” said Bernaard, “let’s start with what we need to do, alright? Don’t give either of us a hard time, okay?”

“Understood,” said the assistant. “Ordering of the supplement ‘hard time’ is to be ceded.”

Both of them let out a large sigh before they refocused their attention to the task at hand.

“Alright then,” said Bernaard. “This is likely going to take much longer than either of us would like.”

“Not if we plan properly,” said Charlie. “C’mon, have a little faith.”

“If His Majesty requests it,” replied Bernaard sarcastically. “Also, I tend to like my job very much. This is how all brilliant innovations start: an almost impossible mission and pioneers trying to scam the

most unintentionally bribed idiot in the country."

"Of course, Minister," said Charlie, redirecting his attention towards his assistant. "Build a judicial software that can deliver an *obiter dicta* in the quickest possible manner."

"Would you like the guilty verdict in bold or italics?" asked the assistant.

"Does it matter?" asked Bernaard in return.

"I'm afraid 'does it matter' does not meet the criteria," replied the assistant. "Bold would be more eye-catching, and italics would be more fancy. Which would you prefer?"

“Bold, obviously,” said Bernaard. “But I don’t see what relevance this has. I mean, can’t we get to the important part and be done with this?”

“What constitutes ‘important,’ Minister?” said Charlie. “I mean, we wouldn’t want it skipping things, would we?”

Bernaard lifted his head diagonally to look at Charlie for a moment, before pursing his lips. The assistant used the silence as an indication to speak.

“The depressed man is correct, Minister Bernaard,” said the assistant. “Loss of certain decision-making power would make a man like you, who craves certainty, very uncomfortable, alongside the auxiliary issues mentioned with skipping important procedure.”

Bernaard, without saying a word, moved his attention back onto the assistant in order to shoot it a look, despite it being unable to see him.

“Move on,” he said after a minute of silence. “Move on, and move on fast.”

“Good,” said the assistant cheerily. “Now, in the event of the tornado, would you like to change the guilty verdict to an italic font? To both warn the bench as well as give those there a final piece of sophistication before their inevitable end?”

Both Bernaard and Charlie stood still in a mixture of shock and annoyance at the question. The lack of, well, humanity in the thinking struck them both for the first

time in decades. But, obviously, with the task at hand, annoyance took precedent.

“To start,” said Charlie, “this is Britain. We don’t get many tornados. To add to that, I would hope you would display a weather warning instead.”

“THANKS FOR YOUR INPUT,” rang the assistant suddenly and loudly. “I WILL TAKE THIS INTO CONSIDERATION.”

The pair covered their ears and began mouthing words at each other. Charlie seemed to say something related to a broken volume button, and Bernaard seemed to be begging for mercy on behalf of his eardrums.

This ping-pong of questioning went on for hours, as the pair answered ridiculous

questions about formatting and how to handle bias. There was the odd important question or two, but the duo didn't seem to give it much quarter. Of course, they didn't realise they were essentially trying to re-rig the justice system right then and there—but task at hand.

After a while, the office shut down, with the two having to bribe (read: pleaded heavily) the janitor machine-bot not to kick them out or report them. Soon, though, hope came around 2 AM.

"Last question," said the assistant, "and the most important: should the time of year, i.e., whether it is summer or winter, change the font size? This is to accommodate the minuscule expansion of eyeballs due to heat in the summer."

"Sure," said Bernaard, his vocal cords only taking orders from the fumes of coffee.

“Anything you’d like.”

“Wait,” perked Charlie, almost triumphantly. “Are we finished?”

“Of course!” said the assistant. “If by ‘we’ you mean section 1 of 120. We still have lots to get through!”

Bernaard began to burst into a series of unintelligible grumbles. Every movement of his vocal cord alternated between being sharp enough to wake London and so soft that it couldn’t move an ant. After his temper tantrum was over, Bernaard asked a question that had been on both their minds for the last 20 minutes.

“Can’t we just rig it?” sighed Bernaard. “I mean, c’mon, we’ve already lied about

the caseload. It's not like anyone in Britain files real cases anymore. We could say the three we picked were at random or some garbage like that."

"Lie like we did to get us here?" said Charlie. "Do the very thing that—"

His eye was caught on a cubicle that looked pillow-like.

"Pretend I never said anything," continued Charlie. "Let's do it. It's only three. It'll be quicker."

"Pass the files—they are in my briefcase," yawned Bernaard.

Charlie placed his hands on Bernaard's briefcase. After rummaging through a pile

of random junk for five minutes—or what felt like five minutes, it could have been longer—he found a crimson red file.

“Why is it so dramatic?” giggled Charlie. “I mean, what are we, trying to murder them?”

“No, don’t be ridiculous,” said Bernaard. “It’s not murder if approved by a ‘qualified’ judge. Now come along—we’ve got cases to judge.”

The pair brought the cases onto the floor and sat on their knees while sorting the different binders into three separate files: one labelled *Jones*, the others labelled *Mr* and *Mrs Turnbutter* respectively. They started with Mrs. Turnbutter, as they had heard her case was the easiest.

“Hold on a moment,” said Bernaard. “This is open and shut. The defence has hard evidence that it’s her own shoe. I mean, how paranoid could a person be?”

Charlie laughed, before stifling it.

“So,” he said, trying to distract from the laugh, “let’s put this away then. We can tell ISAROBOT to just throw the case out. Nothing beyond that.”

“Good thinking,” said Bernaard. “Now, what do you make of this second one? It’s the same Turnbutter—same address.”

“I found it quite odd, actually,” said Charlie. “Are Ambulenco robots really allergic to pollen? How would they help other people with genuine pollen allergies?”

“Funny,” said Bernaard distantly. “I remember signing the legislation that allowed for this one myself. It was under one of the last Tory-Labour administrations. There was some major backlash or something around allowing AI to sue, but I thought it’d be hilarious, and so did the rest of the Commons.”

“So that’s why it got passed?” asked Charlie quaintly.

“Why else?” said Bernaard. “It’s a ridiculous idea altogether, but I thought it would be really funny.”

“That aside,” said Charlie, “we can just make him pay damages to the robot—feeds its babies for a day as a reconciliation thing, I don’t know.”

“I’d quite like that,” said Bernaard. “I can see the headlines already: *ISAROBOT proves to be human after all* or something.”

“That’s settled then,” said Charlie. “Now, about this Jones fellow.”

“Oh my,” said Bernaard. “This Jacob guy that was there—look, Charlie, it’s blacked out. He must have said something really serious then, eh?”

“Profanities aside, Minister,” said Charlie, “same thing as before? Damages for any harm done? I mean, it was also his fault for engaging manual mode with that tap.”

“Eh, plain and boring then,” said Bernaard. “I’ve got nothing more to say.

Now input it in the case order. Also be sure to delete the old preset, would you?"

"As you ask, Minister," said Charlie. He pressed a button, whereafter an indicator flashed, indicating that the first preset has been deleted.

"Come along now," said Bernaard. "We can get a full five hours of sleep before this all goes down."

Ch-8: To Court

“HARPER, COME ALONG,” called Mrs. Jones. “WE’VE GOT TO BE THERE IN 20 MINUTES.”

“ON MY WAY, DEARIE,” called Mr. Jones back. “I’LL BRING THE CHILDREN DOWN AS WELL.”

“WELL, ALRIGHT,” she said. “I’LL GO START THE CAR.”

The two packed their children into the same car that Jones had taken and set out to the courthouse. This journey, however, had two distinct differences.

The first was the little bumps they experienced along the way that Jacob's knee had created. The second was the lack of augmented reality being used—for obvious reasons—much to the terror of Jones's children, who enjoyed the landscape as much as he did.

As the car moved through the same street Jones had lived on for years, he realised something:

He hadn't actually "seen it" in years.

All the other times he had looked at it were through an artificial lens made by his screen. But now? It was there, bare, in all its glory for him to see. While he did notice flaws like he did many years ago, unlike then, he now appreciated them.

It was like seeing the little cracks in an ancient vase. It was a true sign of

authenticity and realism. Jones stared upwards into the soft, blue, English sky. The only words that came into his mind were “ever-expanse.”

“This is the real ever-expanse,” he thought. “And while my waistline can try to compete, it can never match this ever-expanse’s beauty.”

The gentle carvings on the trees and the clouds in the sky reminded Jones of something. It reminded him of the beauty in seeing things that had flaws. It was those flaws that made the object in question something—something to see, something to be admired.

“Without it,” he thought, “it’s manufactured, silicone-esque, barely… alive.”

This made him smile. He smiled like he hadn't since he got his augmented reality screens.

The period of admiration, of course, had to come to an end eventually, which is what happened when they pulled into the courthouse.

The car left the Jones family to go park itself while they entered the building. It was an old brick construction with the words **"Last and only required courthouse in England"** written on the front.

As they entered, their boots resonated throughout the entire hall, which seemed to grow larger the further they went in. At the end, in the centre, like an idol, was a chair with a sort of rubbish-bin-looking bot on it.

“ISAROBOT,” he whispered to his family—but it was no use; it echoed everywhere. “Henry was right. We are too late, and now we are doomed.”

The Turnbutters hauled themselves into Johnny’s car before leaving.

The mechanical hum of the car was only drowned out by the sound of the radio and the deafening silence between the pair. They would have taken separate cars, but they both agreed that the environment and saving energy would be more important than any fight that came between them.

For a while, the sounds of the car, the radio, the silence, and the occasional

loud hum from the car were the only things that so much as approached their eardrums. Then Mr. Turnbutter broke the silence:

“So…” he said distantly. “Erm, interesting weather we are having.”

Mrs. Turnbutter didn’t respond for a full five minutes. Mr. Turnbutter believed it was for dramatic effect, but she was actually thinking of something interesting to say in response.

“Yes, rather interesting,” she finally said, causing him to jump in his seat a little, “particularly bad for those who are stuck with both a contract and tort case on a single day.”

“ALRIGHT,” he roared. “I’M TRYING TO BE NICE, AND HERE YOU ARE ESCALATING. THE WEATHER IS ACTUALLY THE WORST FOR LIGHTWEIGHTS—THAT’S PEOPLE WHO FILE FAKE DIVORCE CASES ON THE WHIM OF THEIR LITTLE AI BUDDY.”

“YOU ARE MISTAKEN,” she roared back. “IT’S ACTUALLY THE WORST FOR…”

This went on for a while, before both of them decided to parley (read: lost their voices) and just glare at each other instead.

As they approached their seats at the courthouse, they saw the Joneses, who smiled at them stupidly. They returned the favour by smiling back equally stupidly.

While this battle of the idiotic face exercise was taking place, Mr. Jones was

attempting to direct their attention towards ISAROBOT, in a bid to warn them. When the couple finally did notice, they came to differing conclusions.

Mrs. Turnbutter felt vindicated, and let's just say Mr. Turnbutter felt less so.

Jacob spent this morning like the last few mornings after the accident: surrounded by his nurses and personal assistant bots in the hospital.

"I mean, he's going to geeet it today," said Jacob. "I already got it cleared with the lawyer bot. His negligence, his loss. My—I may never have to work again, I won't."

"Y'know," said one of the nurse bots, "since you are going to the courthouse anyway, why don't you take my friend with

you? He's an Ambulenco model, the one who had an incident with the pollen."

"I don't see why not," said Jacob. "Bring him in. He must be around somewhere, shouldn't he."

The nurse robot displayed a signal for the Ambulenco to join them. Moments later, loud metallic thumps were heard throughout the hall, which steadily increased in amplitude till they reached Jacob's room.

"I hear I'm your chauffeur," joked Jacob. "Will you be ready in five minutes?"

"Absolutely," replied Ambulenco. "Let's hit the road, the both of us. Do you want me to roll you out?"

“It would be an absolute honour,” said Jacob, raising his hands in the air to show approval.

Realising he had the go-ahead, Ambulenco took Jacob down the stairs and placed him in the car while they set their destination for the courthouse.

“What are you in for?” asked Jacob. “I don’t remember if you were the victim or the perpetrator. I was on quite a bit of paracetamol.”

“The victim,” beeped Ambulenco. “And I may never have to work again if I win this case.”

“Déjà vu,” said Jacob.

“Excuse me?” asked Ambulenco. “Am I not aware of something?”

“Much,” replied Jacob. “Anyhow, how did it happen?”

“The usual,” said Ambulenco. “Honestly, this happens quite often, but I’m just not brave enough to go through with it. This time I did, though.”

“Right,” said Jacob distantly. “So are you going to tell me or just leave me in the dark?”

“Dark sounds about right,” said Ambulenco.

When they reached the courthouse, both of them cheered. Cheered loud enough to

be heard throughout the hall. ISAROBOT was a blessing. After all, how could ISAROBOT be neutral with a fellow kinsman? Jacob was like a brother. Even Ambulenco felt affinity towards him.

It was all falling into place.

“What’s the haul looking like, Marvin?” said Henry. “Any news?”

“Yep,” said Marvin. “Apparently Judge Isabell will be presiding. She likes honesty, so I told both Turnbutter and Jones how to handle it. I’m sure they’ll be fine.”

“Whitehall has been acting up,” said Henry, changing the topic to cool his

nerves. “It’s all a bit funny over there now… like they’re up to something…”

“Bring the man a medal,” cried Marvin. “He’s figured out politicians lie! After this, he’ll find a way to split the atom consecutively and build England another house.”

“Please,” asserted Henry. “Be realistic. The atom thing I get, but the house? Utter folly.”

“You’ve got a point there, ol’ boy,” said Marvin. He then continued along different lines. “You’ve been asking me what I’ve thought about these cases. I want to know what you think.”

“They aren’t just baskets,” said Henry. “They’re the whole weaver’s collection. I mea—”

“Hmph,” coughed Marvin. “I meant their *chances*. Let’s keep it professional here.”

“Oh, that?” perked Henry. “Erm, naught. Both of them have brought almost unwinnable cases before us. I mean, I doubt Isabelle is going to let them off. She runs a strict schedule of things. She’s the kind of person that believes that law is objective and that everyone should be held to a certain standard.”

“Could’ve just said ‘doomed’ and saved me the damn lecture,” grumbled Marvin. “Oh, look at that—land-ho.”

“And you could just say ‘we have arrived’ instead of ‘land-ho,’” grumbled Henry back at Marvin.

As they pulled into the courthouse and walked in, they realised what their clients had only moments earlier.

They were doomed.

“This is it, Bernaard,” said Alysbury. “This is the moment that saves me from no confidence. Finally, I’ll be back where I was party-wise. Everything will fall into place, and all will be well.”

“Grouuuuuu?” said a sleep-deprived Bernaard. “Oh, of course, Prime Minister, as you say.”

“Absoootely, Prime Minister,” said Charlie, stifling a yawn. “I mean, this is going to

make MOJO a household name for the correct reasons."

"There could be much for you," said Alysbury, with a twinkle in his eye. "Who knows what might happen to two hard-working people at Whitehall."

Both Bernaard and Charlie smiled at each other before staring outside in order to hide their exhaustion.

In order to avoid any hassle, the three of them entered through the back entrance before making their way to the Prime Minister's designated viewing area.

As they escorted the Prime Minister, they reached the top of the gallery overlooking the entire courthouse. The two of them took a moment to admire their own handiwork. ISAROBOT looked as

convincing as ever. The only two people (apart from the sanitation staff at the Islington ministry building) who knew the actual truth intended to keep it that way.

“Y’know, Bernaard,” said Alysbury, “I can’t thank you enough here. Where would I be without you?”

“You’ve already thanked me, Prime Minister,” insisted Bernaard. “Let’s just watch the show, shall we? We all deserve a little tinge of a break, don’t we?”

“All jack and no play makes work a dull boy,” said Charlie sleepily.

“Exactly as he said,” seconded Alysbury. “Come along. I think our seats are at this side.”

As they all settled down, Bernaard and Charlie held the same thought, independently of each other:

“For once,” they thought, “we aren’t doomed.”

Ch-9: To Court — 2

“ORDER IN SURROUNDING AREA, THIS IS ISAROBOT,” a voice boomed. “KINDLY SETTLE DOWN.”

“Just as we trained ’em,” hummed Bernaard to what he thought was Charlie, but embarrassingly enough it turned out to be a random man from the Ministry.

“THE FIRST CASE TO BE HEARD IS THE CRIMINAL CASE OF REX (THE KING OF ENGLAND) V JONES (2062),” continued the voice box of ISAROBOT. “BRING THE DEFENDANT AND PROSECUTION FORWARD.”

“Lovely flavour,” thought Bernaard. “Charlie must have added it last minute without telling me.”

Jones, along with Jacob, walked through a small wooden door before sitting at desks on opposing ends of the room. Henry, Marvin, and their respective lawyer bots accompanied them as well. Alongside Jacob sat a timid-looking, dark-haired man in the uniform of the prosecution, with another, secondary lawyer bot as well.

“WOULD THE RIGHT HONORABLE PROSECUTION LIKE TO START ITS OPENING STATEMENTS?” said ISAROBOT.

“We would, your lordship,” said the timid man. “The prosecution believes that the negligence on the part of the defence is not dissimilar to the negligence seen under the case of *Jebecky v Jebecky* (2034). Were it to please the honorable court, may I present the similarities between the cases upon my screen? If it were to aid your lordship, of course.”

“NO,” said ISAROBOT. “IT’S ALRIGHT. I GET IT.”

Hearing this, Bernaard suddenly sat up. Charlie was risk-happy, but he wasn’t this risk-happy. Bernaard quickly whispered some choice words into the ears of the man who he thought was Charlie, before

he was given a tight enough shake to realise what he was doing.

When he finally got his bearings, he walked over to Charlie and signalled him to walk next to him.

“Did you do this, Bernaard?” asked Charlie. “I mean, I’m the risk-happy one, but even by my standards this is much, isn’t it?”

Bernaard’s heart sank for a moment. He didn’t realise what had happened just yet, and he was both anxious to find, and not find out. An ocean of adrenaline lifted it back up.

“If you haven’t changed ISAROBOT’S programming… and I haven’t changed it…” Bernaard began to trail off.

“Think, Minister—what did we do last?” said Charlie. “That must be some clue as to what’s going on.”

“Incredible, Charlie,” said Bernaard, squinting. “Next you are going to tell me to calm down.”

“I’m just saying…” he continued. “Maybe it was something we did.” Charlie gestured at both himself and Bernaard to emphasise this point.

“Look,” replied Bernaard, “maybe we should observe ISAROBOT from a, erm, more enlightening area.”

“Do you mean downstairs, Minister?” asked Charlie.

“Yes, I mean downstairs, you pedant!”

The two made their way away from the Prime Minister’s box, after making some nonsensical excuse about paper, before approaching ISAROBOT from one of the closer seats in the lower chambers.

“MR JONES,” said ISAROBOT, “DO YOU REALISE THAT WHAT YOU DID LIKELY ENDANGERED THE LIFE OF YOUNG JACOB OVER HERE?”

“Maybe,” said Jones. “But I’d argue that the lack of indication from the—”

“SILENCE,” said ISAROBOT, “OR THOU SHALT BE HELD IN CONTEMPT OF COURT.”

Although they made ISAROBOT and were the ones who answered those questions initially, they couldn't even begin to understand why ISAROBOT was having sporadic bursts into theatre-person speak.

"Very sorry, your lordship," said Henry. "My client here may not be fully grasping the gravity of your presence."

"VERY WELL," said ISAROBOT. "I'VE HEARD ENOUGH TO MAKE MY DECISION. ALL PARTIES REMAIN SEATED."

Everyone suddenly took their seats. Charlie and Bernaard began staring at each other. Bernaard in particular was having an intense stare. His eyes were turning red under pressure, his face had enough sweat to drown the ocean, and

his teeth were chattering as though he had been struck with frostbite.

"I SENTENCE HARPER JONES, AGED 53, TO THE AUTOMATIC END CHAMBER," said ISAROBOT. "I CAME TO THIS CONCLUSION AFTER 0.9 SECONDS OF CONSIDERATION."

The entire courthouse gasped as ISAROBOT printed a sheet of text declaring his *obiter dicta* and the guilty verdict.

It was in bold. The same kind they had specified.

Bernaard began hyperventilating as soon as he realised what had happened. Even Charlie wasn't able to contain his own fear. At that moment, it didn't matter who

had done what, which questions were answered where and how—it was over. Just over. Little could have been done by anyone to save them. They had accidentally orchestrated the unjust murder of a seemingly innocent man.

“Do you think,” gasped Bernaard, “do you think you may have deleted the wrong preset yesterday?”

A knot of sweat flew off Charlie’s face as he moved his head to gesture a yes.

“Do you think we failed to mention that only up-to-date English law be used?” asked Charlie. “I mean, the assistant did ask u—”

While they were speaking, the trial for Mrs. Turnbutter's case had already begun. Charlie was suddenly interrupted by the boom of ISAROBOT's voice.

"UNDER THE WITCHCRAFT ACT OF 1542," said ISAROBOT, "AND THE COMMON LAW PRECEDENT SET IN THE VILLAGE OF NOWHERE, RUTLAND, YOU ARE SENTENCED TO THE GALLOWS, AND IN THEIR ABSENCE, THE AUTOMATIC END CHAMBER."

"BUT," pleaded Mrs. Turnbutter, "I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING."

"PRECISELY THE ISSUE," said ISAROBOT. "THIS SIGN HERE TELLS ALL THOSE TO REMAIN SILENT IN BETWEEN CASES. YOUR ADHERENCE TO THIS PROVES YOUR LITERACY; THUS, YOU ARE A WITCH."

“Bu—” said Mrs. Turnbutter quaintly.

“SHE’S ATTEMPTING TO CHANT AN INCANTATION,” roared ISAROBOT, while pointing a finger at her. “TAKE HER AWAAAYYYYYY.”

Mrs. Turnbutter, much to everyone’s horror, was taken away by a group of Policinator bots and placed under handcuffs and strapped into a chair. She began resisting and trying to get the attention of Mr. Turnbutter, who was being brought forward for the hearing of his own case.

In the chaos, a tall, brown-haired man with a calm demeanour walked towards both Bernaard and Charlie.

“The Prime Minister would like to see you two,” he said. “He’s rather pleased with what has happened so far. He thinks it’ll look brilliant in the papers.”

The pair were too floored to even begin to speak, so to supplement it they held their thumbs up and followed the man back upstairs.

“The men of the hour!” said Alysbury. “It works! It’s brilliant! I think it’s using stuff that’s a little older, but we can’t expect it to be completely up-to-date, can we?”

“Of course not, Prime Minister,” squealed Bernaard, looking at his shoes. “That’s just the way the cookie crumbles, isn’t it.”

“I believe the expression is ‘concrete crumbles,’ Bernaard,” said Alysbury. “But none’s the matter. The final case is here—look!”

Everyone in the Prime Minister's box looked downward into the centre of the courthouse to see the final case.

"DEAR MR AMBULENCO," said ISAROBOT sympathetically, "DID YOU FEEL THREATENED BY THE ACTIONS OF MR TURNBLADDER HERE?"

"Yes," said Ambulenco.

"THAT SETTLES IT THEN," said ISAROBOT. "VIA THE PRECEDENT SET BY R (THE KING OF ENGLAND) V JONES (2062), I SENTENCE YOU TO THE AUTOMATIC END CHAMBER. FAILURE TO CONSULT THE ARCHBISHOP OF THE SHOES COUNTS AS AN AGGRAVATING FACTOR."

Bernaard, at this point, was desensitised to the horror and just shrugged.

“Did he just cite precedent set by himself five minutes ago?” asked Charlie.

“I think so,” said Bernaard, wiping the sweat off his brow.

“Brilliant! Brilliant!” said Alysbury. “There is no way I am losing the confidence vote now, am I?”

“Erm, Prime Minister,” said the brown-haired man, “aren’t you worried about how the outcomes of these cases are going to look in Parliament?”

“Any issue with that, Mr. Boy-Intern?” said Alysbury, leaning his head forward

mockingly. “You are here to learn, so here is some advice: keep quiet. The responsible adults are speaking.”

“As you wish, Prime Minister,” said the boy-intern indifferently, walking away with a grin.

“Where are they all going?” asked Charlie.

“Away,” said Bernaard. “Come, it’s nearly time for our break.”

“You think we’ll be caught?” asked Charlie. “I mean, there was that janitor bot.”

“If we need be blamed,” said Bernaard. “If no confidence gets to the PM first, then we’ll be alright.”

As he said it, Bernaard believed it, and the two walked away feeling as though they could make their way out of the situation, like they usually did. When they left the courthouse, they saw Alysbury gesturing at them. They knew they could make it out.

“HELP US,” said Mrs. Turnbutter, banging at the window on the other end of the chamber. “THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT ERROR. YOU CAN’T END US IN HERE.”

“Hiiii therreeeee,” rang a deep metallic voice from the inside. “This is the Automatic End Chamber, and today is the best day ever.”

“WHAT,” yelled Jones, “WHY CAN YOU TALK? YOU ARE A DEATH CHAMBER.”

“I ask myself that sometimes,” it said. “My wife used to ask me that… have you ever been on Prozac?”

The three members of the death-row crew paused for a moment. Why was the End Chamber making conversation with them?

“If you are asking about the anti-depressen then I think no?” said Mr. Turnbutter. “I mean, yes, like once at a friend’s house? But I wasn’t prescribed it. He said it’d make me feel better.”

“Me too,” said the Chamber. “I just can’t go on, y’know. It’s all like having a giant bucket over one’s neck.”

“YOU CAN’T GO ON?” roared Mr. Jones. He found himself roaring a lot these days. “WE ARE ABOUT TO BE KILLED OVER A PROCEDURAL ERROR AND YOU CAN’T GO ON?”

“I’m sorry,” said the Chamber. “Was that insensitive? My ex-wife always said I was insensitive—that I couldn’t understand her sometimes.”

“Hey,” said Mr. Turnbutter in the most quiet voice he’d used in an hour, “I mean, the fact that you can recognise it shows sympathy on your part, doesn’t it?”

“I guess it does,” said the Chamber, almost contemplating what Turnbutter was saying. “But it doesn’t matter, does it? She doesn’t love me anymore.”

“Hold on a moment,” asked Mrs. Turnbutter. “Who was your wife, anyway? Pardon me, but you are a chamber, aren’t you?”

“Wow,” said the Chamber. “I knew my looks were bad, but not that bad. I mean, she said she loved me regardless, but maybe she was lying?”

“What?” said Jones, not realising why he was speaking. “You are the most handsome chamber I have ever seen. What do you mean ugly?”

“You’re just flattering me,” moaned the Chamber. “Lying is wrong, but you are trying to be nice. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, and I mean what I said, alright?” said Jones. “Beauty is subjective,

and if your wife made you feel like you weren't beautiful, maybe that was on her, not you."

They had officially gone bonkers. The trio began huddling up together to conspire as to how to raise the Chamber's self-esteem.

"If we are going to have a last deed," they thought, "shouldn't it be something good?"

After a good 20 minutes of chatting, one of them finally cracked.

"So, Automatic"—as they had begun to call him—"what's up now?" asked Jones.

“Want to leave me so soon?” said the Chamber. “It’s like you don’t even like me. I mean, do you even want me to kill you?”

“Not really, no,” they said in unison.

“Oh, that’s sad,” the Chamber said. “But it was nice meeting you. I won’t take up any more of your time. Look, I’ve made a note cancelling your death warrent. I’ve put the usual excuse of seasonal depression on it. I quite like fall, though, so it can be our secret.”

A thin rectangular-shaped hole in the wall printed three pieces of paper with massive red X’s over them to indicate cancellation.

“See you for now!” said the Chamber as it slowly opened its door. “Come visit me, yeah? Same place—we can have nice old chats.”

A chorus of promises fled from their mouths before they collected their papers and headed back towards Suburbia.

Epilogue

After a few weeks, the Turnbutters would get divorced—until getting remarried, and then divorced again, as they tried to

navigate everything. Mrs. Turnbutter finally did realise that it was her shoe, and apologised to Mr. Turnbutter with a, “Well, you would have done the same,” to which he begrudgingly agreed.

Jacob would net a huge settlement from Jones, which Jones funded through the selling of a lot of his gadgets. In a twist of fate, Jones actually enjoyed the greater amount of silence he had—or so he told himself. Yes, his pants didn’t put themselves on anymore, and yes, a 120-inch TV wasn’t as nice as the full 140. But he was surprisingly happy and content about it.

The Ambulenco bot would gain a settlement as well, albeit a smaller one than Jacob had secured. Mr. Turnbutter would pay for it when he was able to sell the newest, sixth-built house in England.

At the Very Big Law Company London.co, Henry would finally get his long-awaited promotion. Marvin would get transferred to the Slightly Smaller Yet Still Extremely Significant Big Law Company London.co, where he would get a more senior position.

At Whitehall, politics marched on like it always had. Alysbury would survive the no-confidence vote for the Judicial Affair, as it would be known later, but would be forced to resign after the much more serious “Silly Socks” scandal. This would ultimately pave the way for Bernaard’s 20 consecutive minutes as Prime Minister. Charlie would take over after him for a whole 20 and a half minutes, which he used entirely to brag.

Jones would go back to his normal everyday job. His pay was docked for the days he missed, but he was happy to be

alive. The only thing that really changed was the amount he would use technology, thanks to the settlement payments.

And most importantly, the Automatic End Chamber had begun therapy, and had reportedly found a new partner. And yes—he still does speak to the three on a weekly basis.

Judicial reform would eventually come, yes—albeit after the second Silly Sock scandal and the first tornado Britain ever experienced.

But that, sweet reader, is for the next internal inquiry.

Fin.

Except not really I have some more things to say

The Boring Part Where I Explain Everything in Excruciating Detail

Here's a little secret: this book was initially written (or was going to be written) as a major essay. In it, I was going to explore the changes that the technology we're all seeing right now would have on the creation, enforcement, and legacy of the law.

I decided against writing it that way for two reasons.

The first was a realisation that it would be better to *show* rather than *tell* readers what I meant by "the effects." Shallow examples wouldn't have sufficed to the extent I would have liked, so I thought a narrative format might be better.

The second is half-alluded to at the start: *"No normal person would want to look into the deep intricacies of judicial reform."* My goal with this story was to have normal, everyday people read it. There's no point in writing a commentary about society—or anything, really—that most people just won't want to read.

You can still sort of see my original vision here. Jones was intended to be a typical criminal case (although I admit my creative vices got the better of me). Mrs. Turnbutter was meant to represent contract law. Mr. Turnbutter's case with the Ambulenco was meant to represent tort and duty-of-care law.

The way this book has been spaced also aligned (bad pun, sorry) with the hope that normal people would actually be able to read it. There are short, quick bursts of dialogue, with a greater

emphasis on narrative rather than long, winding descriptive elements. I know it's difficult for people like me—Readers™—to realise this, but functioning human beings have short attention spans. They don't really want to hear about the little details of a rose garden if it isn't going to aid the story. It just looks like waffle and fluff.

This isn't just a jab at young people either—you'd be surprised how many older people lack attention spans. Don't believe me? Check your family WhatsApp group and then tell me I'm wrong.

A giant wall of text isn't just intimidating—it's off-putting. For people who aren't used to reading, it's vindication that reading has no fun elements and just brings back memories of school textbooks. I didn't want that. So, I deliberately made the text have a greater punch.

Now, the bigger-picture stuff.

What I'm seeing with AI, and the way it's probably going to change law, made me think a little. Especially with the incident I mentioned in the foreword. The fact of the matter is, what we're seeing with mass-produced images and AI slop content is probably going to change the way most of us view objective reality.

The whole structure of law is based on the ideas of eyewitnesses and commonly held belief. Émile Durkheim, a sociologist, spoke about the breakdown of common morality and the issues that might cause within law. What I'm more concerned about is the breakdown of *common reality.* The idea that two people can look at the same image and be told to think of it in completely different ways is frightening to me.

Augmented reality is going to change things a lot—as I illustrated with Jones—along with a greater reliance on "yes man" assistants (though I hope that reduces, especially). Before, the old maxim was *"I'll believe it when I see it."* Now it's *"I'll see it when I believe it."*

I also wanted to speak about legislation. In most discussions about law, I feel the legislature is often neglected—even though it's the most important part. Obviously, the fact that I speak English and primarily read common-law articles has a lot to do with that, but still, my point stands. That's why I dedicated such large portions to Charlie, Alysbury, and especially Bernaard.

My mission was also to ensure that there were no *heroes* in the book (except maybe the Automatic End Chamber—he's cool. No, I'm not playing favourites, *you're* playing favourites, shush). Every character was meant to have some kind of flaw. Some are worse than others, sure, but no one was meant to be "good."

And finally: if any of you flatter yourselves enough to think I based an entire character off you? I didn't. It's all me.